

Mindful choices - The role of perceived pressure

Abstract:

How and when do students develop occupational aspirations? We examine this question with a focus on the role of beliefs, preferences (decision weights), and parental pressure for 2,840 students between sixth and ninth grade in Germany's non-academic educational tracks by focusing on whether girls and boys aspire to STEM-related (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) career tracks or not. We find that increased parental pressure significantly widens the gender gap in STEM aspirations in all grades, starting in sixth grade with girls reducing their STEM aspirations by 13.3 percentage points as a reaction to increased parental pressure. While decision weights do not significantly differ between girls and boys, beliefs become increasingly polarized across gender and go from increasing the gender gap by less than 5 percentage points in sixth grade to a contribution of more than 15 percentage points in ninth grade. The findings suggest that external influences like parental pressure can shape occupational aspirations even before students form precise beliefs about alternative occupations and may influence students' subsequent formation of beliefs and aspirations.

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